

LESSON 3
INTRODUCTION TO THE KABBALAH

The Kabbalah is an esoteric form of teaching and philosophy that is to a certain extent skelatonic in format but when applied to a 10 stage glyph called the Tree of Life it gives a breakdown by virtue of association to almost any given situation. One can, by studying the Kabbalah, find where and when one is at a certain point in any circumstance, and the nature of the obstacles one has to overcome to arrive at the conclusion of a project. It provides a clear blueprint or path for esoteric studies.

In the 19th century book called the Cannon, it's author gives the following excellent analysis of the Kabbalah:

"The Cabalistic theology, representing the endless reasoning of countless generation of ingenious men, in the epitome of mans first efforts to grasp the problems connected with the cause and continuance of life, the inscrutable mystery which baffled the understanding of all inquires alike. They reasoned concerning all phenomena of existence by their analogy to human creation, and it was supposed that the universal creation took place after the manner of human creation, and the generative attributes of a man and a woman were those of god and the universe, and finally that all the bodily functions of a human being and their counterpart in the macrocosm or greater world."

The theoretical system based upon these ideas constituted, the secret doctrine, which was taught orally, and never written. All the old Canonical writings are an exposition of its teachings, but these works are composed, so that only those persons, who are instructed in the rules of the hidden wisdom could discover their meaning."

The above statement adequately summarises the essence of Kabbalistic teachings. As to the actual spelling of the word Kabbalah there may be some confusion as it has been through the centuries spelt a number of different ways. A popular method is to take it from the Hebrew root QBL which means to receive and is spelt Qabalah which has been more or less adopted as the standard method of spelling it. Other variations of the words are Cabala, Caballa, Kabbala, Kabala and Gabbalah to name but a few. Ultimately though it still comes down towards personal preference which for the duration of this course is spelt Kabbalah which has possibly a more reliable etymological base than any of the above origins of the word.

"Commonly the derivation (of the word Kabbalah) is traced to the Hebrew word *Qabil*, meaning to receive, collect, and this is translated tradition. This seems to us to be somewhat forced and inexact. We believe the Hebrew word *Kabbale* to be of Chaldo-Egyptian origin, signifying occult science or doctrine.

The Egyptian root *Khepp*, *Khop* or *Kheb*, *Khob*; in Hebrew, *gab*, *Kheb* or *Khebet*, means hide, enclose, and *Al* or *Ol* in Egyptian

signifies take: so that the word would mean a science taken from hidden principles". (F.S. Contancin, Encycl. du XIIIe Siecle)

The main point to concern ourselves with is the fact that the word Kabbalah existed in oral terms for over a thousand years and its spelling is in fact an after thought (whatever the method utilised) to describe a great method of spiritual teaching.

It must be clearer by now that the Kabbalah is in fact a tool to unlock the secrets of the scriptures of the Old Testament by showing them in a completely new light. Taking this further to great Kabbalistic books like the Zohar shows us that it is a progressional form of teaching that each generation adds to. In its original form the Kabbalah was a disjointed record of teachings from various Rabbi through the ages which has survived in a type of cryptic question and answer format. Years after these early Kabbalistic doctrines had been written, countless scholars began to formulate a new opinion of the old manuscripts and the teachings of the Kabbalah began to establish themselves in a ten stage glyph called the Tree of Life. Each of these ten stages or Sephiroth (as they became known as) showed growth from a single cell into a full unit of ten. Interconnecting each of these Sephiroth are twenty two paths (often associated to the twenty two letters of the Hebrew alphabet) which are in fact an active reflection of each of the ten stages.

<u>Sephiroth</u>	<u>Letters</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
1. Kether	K-Th-R	Crown
2. Chokmah	Ch-K-M-H	Wisdom
3. Binah	B-I-N-H	Understanding
4. Chesed	Ch-S-D	Mercy
5. Geburah	G-B-U-R-H	Severity & Strength
6. Tiphareth	Th-Ph-A-R-Th	Beauty
7. Netzach	N-Ts-Ch	Victory
8. Hod	H-O-D	Glory
9. Yesod	Y-S-O-D	Foundation
10. Malkuth	M-L-K-U-Th	Kingdom

The entire concept of these ten stages of learning is the use of polarity in teaching. Each Sephiroth, when placed on the Tree of Life is in juxtaposition so that each is an exact counter-balance of the other. The Kabbalah has been described as a ladder of lights for it not only shows formation (descent into matter) but also shows how one can use it for ascent as well (through ritual, prayer and meditation) which theoretically takes us back to the pure state of both mind and body that is epitomised by Kether, the first Sephira which is sometimes called the godhead or true self.

While in its infancy the Kabbalah was considered as an obscure or sectarian aspect of the Hebrew religion but under the process of time it diverted into a form of mysticism that held itself aloof from the main stream of western thought.

The modern concept of visualisation of the Tree of Life (which today is considered indistinct from the Kabbalah itself) is to assume that it has three pillars. The left hand side is the pillar of Severity, the middle is the neutral or Middle Pillar while the right hand side is the pillar of Mercy. By using this method one can understand the use of polarity applied to the Tree of Life.

To state outright that inherent in each individual there is a Kabbalistic Tree of Life (on the lines of the DNA double helix) would be something of a gross misconception. What happens, is that through study and meditation one applies certain potencies of the Sephiroth and gradually the psyche orientates to a system of growth along Kabbalistic lines. Carl Jung commented that when studying the ancient science of alchemy, as the practical and theoretical alchemical knowledge was applied the psyche began to change so that it was brought in line with the experiments being performed. The same psychological aspects could be applied to Kabbalistic studies as well. As the aspiring student starts to meditate and experience the energies of the Sephiroth (whether it be in daily life or through meditation) he finds that they become real potencies of forces that start to act up when the psyche starts to regroup its component parts that are scattered throughout the subconscious, into cells that start to resemble the Sephiroth. Most of the experiences of these Kabbalistic energies will be both of ascent and descent with the reception of the energies flowing down from Kether and their return through active effort and ritual work .

Another simplified explanation of Kabbalistic meditation is that the glyph of the Tree of Life becomes so implanted in the mind of the devotee, that it becomes for all intent and purposes a collection of artificial archetypes that tidy up the relative aspects of the subconscious to more easily accessible areas that the individual can relate to within the confines of the self.

The classification of the Kabbalah can be divided into four main general areas:

PRACTICAL KABBALAH = Practical and Ceremonial Magic, Divination and Alchemy.

LITERAL KABBALAH = Gematria - Numerical value of words and letters.

Notoriqon - Anagrams.

Temurah - Permutation of letters.

Tarot - Study of universal archetypes.

UNWRITTEN KABBALAH = Oral teachings.

DOGMATIC KABBALAH = Study of Kabbalistic doctrines and texts.

Because the essence of Kabbalistic teaching was oral tradition it is difficult to pinpoint its exact origin but one of the first written Kabbalistic texts is the book Sepher Yetzirah. Its date in manuscript form is said to be around the 10th century but

its roots in oral form were possibly around 100 A.D., though some esoteric scholars have firmly entrenched it in the Old Testament at the time of Moses and were thought to be part of the original laws handed down by him. Other branches of Kabbalistic scholars have considered that its origins were from Abraham the Patriarch. When studying some of the early Rabbinical literatures there is little doubt that the Kabbalah (in the form of the Sepher Yetzirah) is a book of theology very distinct from the Mishnah and Gemara which are of course the basis of the Talmud.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Sepher Yetzirah and Kabbalistic theology is the grammatical use of the Hebrew language which gives it a clear anchor to planetary and other astrological associations. This stands out with the association to the three mother letters of Aleph, Mem and Shin to the three elements, with the 7 double letters to the planets, and the 12 simple letters to the Zodiac signs. Hebrew scholars of the last century, such as Wyn Wescott, have confirmed that the Sepher Yetzirah, though not widely known is mentioned in the Talmud of Jerusalem and of Babylon.

Another Rabbinical book called the Bahir also came into prominence around the 12th century though modern exponents of this remarkable piece of literature place its date in manuscript form around the 6th century A.D. Though not considered by some scholars as a strict Kabbalistic text there is no doubt that there are parts of it that are Kabbalistic in concept, as the Sephiroth are clearly mentioned and commented on, and as such,

has been included in the Kabbalistic literature category.

Without doubt the main piece of Kabbalistic literature is the Zohar, or Book of Splendour. It first came into general notice around 1290 when it was published by Moses de Leon. A fierce controversy has raged ever since to the book's original authorship which de Leon claimed to have been copied from an old text said to have been written by Simeon Be Jacobi who lived in the 2nd century A.D. under the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antonitus. It is doubtful that the entire Zohar can be attributed to his authorship as clearly other books have been added to the body of the original text that relate to a later period of philosophical thought.

The Zohar comprises of the following books:

1. Tosephta & Mathanithan - Small additional pieces
2. Hecaloth - The Mansion or Palaces of light
3. Sithre Torah - Mysteries of the Torah
4. Midrash Ha Neelan - Mysteries of Midrash
5. Raja Mehemna - Faithfull Shepherd
6. Raze Derazin - Secret of Secrets
7. Saba Demishpatim - Discourse of the age of Mishpatim
8. Siphra Detzniutha - Book of Secrets or Mysteries
9. Idra Rabba - The Greater Assembly
10. Yenuka - Discourse of the Young Man
11. Idra Sutra - Lesser Assembly
12. Idra Di Be Mashkana - Assembly before a lecture on Torah

13. Rev Methivtha - Academy Head
14. Kav Ha Middah - Standard of Measure
15. Sithre Othioth - Secret of Letters
16. Midrash Ha Neelam Midrash Ruth - On the Book of Ruth
17. Tikkune Zohar - New Supplements of the Zohar
18. Sifra Di Tseniutha - Book of Concealment
19. Untitled Commentary on the Song of Solomon

Other Kabbalistic texts of note include the Commentary on the Ten Sephiroth by Rabbi Azariel ben Menachem (in the year 1200), a former student of the noted Kabbalist Isaac the Blind (1190-1210), father of the Gerona School of Kabbalism. The Treatise on the Emanation by Isaac Nasir, The Gate of Heaven by Jacob ben Sheshet, The Alphabet by Rabbi Akiba, The Garden of Pomegranates by Moses Cordovra (1591) are just some of the note worthy Kabbalistic texts of interest but at this stage in the course most of these and other published earlier Kabbalistic literature would be meaningless to the reader save that in the knowledge that the rhetoric of the Kabbalah is very long and well documented.

THE KABBALAH ON THE TREE OF LIFE

